

I have a cat, a striped cat
with tickling whiskers and
green electric eyes. She has
the softest fur in the world.
When I pet her she purrs as if
she has a drum near her heart.

My aunt Shelly from
Oklahoma says some cats are
good luck. You pet them and
good things happen. There
aren't many in the world.
Maybe one in millions and
billions.

Woogie is a good luck cat.
Aunt Shelly pet her on the
way to bingo and came back
with money to buy us all new
shoes.

I pet her when I lost my favorite beaded earrings I planned to wear to the spring powwow, then found them under my bed.

Aunt Shelly says cats have nine lives, but Woogie's nine lives, for all her good luck gifts, went fast.

The first life went when
she climbed up in Mom's car
to keep warm near the motor.

She nearly lost the end of her tail when Mom started the car.

Her second life escaped
when she followed my brother
and me to school.

She ran out in front of a car. I closed my eyes and screamed, but when the car passed she was sitting across the street, licking her paws.

The third life I only hear about when I got back from the grocery store. Mom told the story for weeks.

She had turned the dryer on and gone upstairs. It was a good thing she had forgotten her coffee, because when she came back down, who did she see spinning and yowling in the dryer window?

The fourth life I don't like
to talk about.

My cousin Krista's dog chased Woogie and almost ate her. She looked like a soggy washrag. She had to get stitches, and she limped for a month.

The fifth life was Woogie's
own fault.

She got in a fight with my cousins Megan and Ben's cat over a bird. I don't like that about cats, but Aunt Shelly says they are born to hunt.

Her sixth life was lost
when she fell from the top of
a tree.

She was—you guessed it—
hunting birds. I thought cats
always landed on their feet.
Woogie landed on her head.

My dad watch Woogie's
seventh life fly by him as she
ran after it.

She was running from
some boys who had shot her in
the ear with a BB gun.

The eighth life was my
fault.

I wanted to take her to the powwow with us. My parents said no. So did Aunt Shelly. But I hid her in the trunk, behind our outfits, behind Ben's bustle, in a box I punched with breathing holes. Then I forgot about her.

Mom said it was a good thing it wasn't summer. Woogie would have died. I made it up to her with licks of my snow cone.

One day Woogie didn't
come home.

My cousins and I looked for her for hours. We looked in the dryer and in Krista's backyard. We looked under Woogie's hunting tree and in the trunk of the car. But we found no good luck cat. Aunt Shelly drove us all around until way past dark, as far as the grocery store.

We knocked on every door,
but no one had seen her.

For four days I missed my striped cat with the softest fur, the tickling whiskers, and the green electric eyes. I missed the tender drumming of her heart. Mom said Woogie must have used up her ninth life.

Yet every morning and every night she called the animal shelter, asking for our good luck cat.

Aunt Shelly, who was losing badly at bingo, said she wouldn't give up yet.

All I could think of was the
BB-gun boys, my cousin's dog,
all the motors in the world,
and the highway near the
grocery store.

On the fourth night I put a dish of meat loaf, Woogie's catnip mouse, and her ball with the elastic string by the door. I sang her favorite song. I asked her to come home.

That night I dreamed
about her.

Woogie the good luck cat
ran toward me. She was
smiling.

The next morning we found Woogie curled up by her empty dish and her catnip mouse. Her left ear was bitten in half, but she was purring and singing as if she had never left.

"This is definitely a real good luck cat," Aunt Shelly said, as we let our Woogie in. "She has more than nine lives." Woogie smiled. So did I. I know Aunt Shelly is right.